

CHAPTER 3

URBAN DESIGN & COMMUNITY CHARACTER



City of Liberty Lake Comprehensive Plan

A. Introduction



The Urban Design and Community Character Element is intended to establish general principles and mechanisms that help define and guide patterns of development in the City of Liberty Lake. The goals, policies, and programs identified in this element also help to assure that new development is consistent with the existing built and natural environments. The design of the community and its physical development should to the greatest degree possible reflect the essential values of current residents. For the City of Liberty Lake, these values include the preservation of valuable natural resources, such as Liberty Lake and the Spokane River, the beautiful environment with surrounding hillsides, and the preservation of the City's character.

The majority of the area within the City began as a master planned satellite community. Several of the commercial and industrial developments were established with covenants that defined maximum signage heights, building colors, landscaping, materials, etc. Most of the residential neighborhoods were also set up with covenants that outlined what was acceptable for each neighborhood. The urban design and community character element along with supporting development regulations and design standards will advance the City's identity and improve upon the previous efforts to establish a community character.

The Urban Design and Community Character Element is directly related to the Land Use, Transportation, and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Elements. Attitudes toward land use, traffic systems, community safety, and environmental resources shape the physical development of the community and help define its character. With major local, state, and interstate roadways passing through the City, and the associated dependence on automobile travel, sustaining the City of Liberty Lake's identity and quality of life depends on maintaining continuity, uniqueness, and a "sense of place." Building and site designs that reflect the natural features and character of the City provide continuity of design throughout the area. Performed successfully, this will result in a positive interaction with the Economic Development element.



Clearly recognized by the City of Liberty Lake is the need for, and the appropriateness of, community design standards and development criteria within the community. Design that is sensitive both aesthetically and environmentally is essential to preserving and enhancing the diverse economic and neighborhood-based character of the City of Liberty Lake. The scale and scope of land use patterns, management of transportation, flood control facilities, and community open space and conservation areas must respond and complement the human and natural environment to reflect the City's long-term community character envisioned in this plan.



A variety of architectural styles, materials, and colors can be supported to reflect the resident-friendly flavor of the City. The integration of the natural environment, including rocks, gravel, and native plant materials into the urban fabric will also extend the surrounding landscape into the built environment. Existing and future development that focuses on quality design, ease of access, pedestrian friendliness, quality materials, and craftsmanship will help assure the construction of a built environment of which the City can be proud.

Urban Design & Community Character Element Vision Statements¹

1. Establish clearly defined design standards
2. Encourage the use of a town design plan for future development
3. Pedestrian friendly commercial developments
4. Preserve natural beauty
5. Promote unity within the city and surrounding communities, governments, and businesses

B. History and Background

The creation of a sense of place begins with embracing the unique environment and character of the City. Future projects, including homes and public gathering places such as parks, trails, bike paths, and recreation areas, will help establish an identifiable city character and contribute to a renewed sense of place. Other new developments, including commercial development such as restaurants, shops, plazas, other non-residential development, and the Central Business District, can provide an important basis for "place making" in the city.

Ahwahnee Principles

In pursuing the goal of making the City of Liberty Lake a livable and vibrant community, the City has utilized *The Ahwahnee Principles*, as a guide. These principles address the need for communities and regions to have a vision and strategy for economic development and an enriched sense of community. Visioning, planning, and implementation efforts should continually involve all sectors, including the voluntary civic sector and those traditionally uninvolved in the public planning process by obtaining community input and conducting public workshops and meetings. The principles that the City of Liberty Lake has outlined are as follows:



1. All planning will be done to form a complete and integrated community containing housing, shops, work places, schools, parks, and civic facilities, essential to the daily life of the our residents.
2. The City shall contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
3. The City shall have a Central Business District that combines commercial, civic, cultural, residential, and recreational uses.
4. The Central Business District, Community Centers, and Neighborhood Centers will be designed so that housing, jobs, daily needs, and other activities are within easy walking or biking distance of each other.
5. As many activities as possible should be located within easy walking distance of transit stops.

¹ Vision Statements were created by the Planning Commission and City Council to reflect citizen comments.

6. The community will contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens, and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.
7. Public spaces shall be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people.
8. The City and clusters of neighborhoods should have a well-defined edge, such as greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.
9. Streets, pedestrian paths, and trails shall contribute to a system of fully-connected, interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees, and lighting; and by discouraging high speed traffic.
10. Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of the community should be preserved with superior examples contained within parks or greenbelts.
11. The community design should help conserve resources and minimize waste.
12. The City should encourage the efficient use of water.
13. The street orientation, the placement of buildings, and the use landscaping shall contribute to the aesthetics and energy efficiency of the City.

Natural Systems and a Basic Strategy

Development and population growth result in substantial environmental effects, which can be best addressed through a thoughtful integration of the natural environmental systems with those of the built environment. Developing and projecting a holistic picture of the mature City with a sensitivity to site-specific design and development provides the basis for innovative uses of old and new approaches. Drainage swales, for example, are viewed not only as stormwater and runoff control, but also as opportunities for open space and a place for wildlife to congregate.



Foundations of the Urban Design and Community Character Element

The technical and philosophical basis for community design affects the design, development, and build-out of the City.

Cohesiveness

The cohesiveness of the City of Liberty Lake is achieved by its connections to the natural features and character of the City, and maintained by the recognition and continuation of characteristics that have been handed down over time. The City's integration of Ahwahnee Principles into its future design and development, along with attention to creating a pleasing balance between the natural and built environments, are the guidelines by which a sense of community will be enhanced.



Cohesiveness in design can be sustained through an adherence to the essentials of scale and proportion, site and setting, and materials and color. The integration of the natural environment into the urban fabric enhances cohesiveness in design of the community. Within these essential principles, a variety of architectural styles and materials can be supported.

The area provides an inspiring and pliable palette for design. It also presents clear constraints and opportunities to living in a variable climate. The use of native and variable weather/season tolerant landscaping also extends the continuity of the natural into the built environment. The use of trees, shrubs, grass, open areas, rocks, and boulders further promotes the continuity of the built and natural environments.

Character and Identity

The City of Liberty Lake's natural setting, foothills, and nearby lake and river are highly recognizable features that define the City's character and identity. A distinctive attribute of the City of Liberty Lake is the remarkable mountain views existing from nearly every location in the City. The character of the community and its setting can be preserved and enhanced through the integration of thoughtful grading and re-vegetation, the use of landscape materials indigenous to the area, and building materials that compliment them. The City and its surroundings attract families, visitors, and businesses that value the community's environment and the City has unique and valuable resources near which to build.

Encouraging the re-integration of native landscaping materials will also preserve and enhance the City's uniqueness. A wide variety of native and ornamental introduced plants make up the local landscape palette. The natural landscape and the protection of open space further the unique and marketable qualities of the community.

Placemaking

An essential component of the City's affirmation of a sense of place is its conscious focus on the unique opportunities that exist in the City. As a newly emerging center for business, government, and culture, the introduction of a Central Business District can establish a course for the City as well as being its core for activity. Existing and future design shall continue to emphasize quality planning, design, material, and craftsmanship essential to assuring structures and other aspects of the built environment of which the City can be proud. Moreover, quality design standards in most thoughtful development need cost no more, and can cost the community much less than poorly conceived and insensitive design. The near and long-term benefits to the community of well-envisioned design and quality development are significant.

Building from the Central Business District, the City can use Ahwahnee Principles to define other neighborhoods within the City, and to create a self-sufficient, livable community. The Urban Design and Community Character Element establishes the policies and programs that can lead to planning which reflects the unique character of all the City's developments, whether residential, commercial, or industrial.



Opportunities for Variation in Neighborhood Character

The beauty and delicacy of the City's natural environment, the surrounding lake, river, and hillsides, and those portions of the built environment that we cherish and hope to preserve are the primary context within which community design judgments are made. The sharp contrast between the natural and built environment is a unique opportunity for community design. The level of assessment and the appropriate perspective will vary with the land use and location being considered. For instance, residential development proposed in highly exposed sites and commercial development plans require distinctly different design review criteria. In every case, new development is required to respect its location and the scale and character of the surrounding built environment.

Harmony and Disharmony

The character of the City of Liberty Lake is reflected both in the high degree of harmony between the built and natural environment, and in areas where incoherent development still occurs in the City. A wide range of siting and architectural design opportunities is available and should allow the City to retain character in new development. Adhering to the use of natural materials, complementary colors and tones for building surface, and the liberal integration of open space into community design concepts are more in keeping with the central character of the City.



Nonetheless, flexibility and sensitive design evaluation, and the ability to see the positive qualities of various architectural styles are also essential to a receptive design review process. If quality design is lacking and cannot be secured from the developer or architect, then unsatisfactory development proposals should not be approved. Sensitive design harmonized with surrounding buildings, avoids excessive disruption and does not overly compete for attention.

Diverse design approaches should avoid being abrasive and seek an elegant and dynamic integration with the existing and planned built environment. It is equally important to promote an eclectic collection of styles, and not to homogenize the design elements of a neighborhood, leaving it a monotonous repetition of elevations, roof lines, building materials, and colors.

Criteria for Evaluating Building and Site Design

The relationship of new and infill development to other structures and the larger environment should be the focus of building and site design evaluation. Scenic, architectural and landscape architectural resources, and the established character of a neighborhood provide a basic frame of reference for proposed development. Planning and design criteria assist in determining a project's compatibility with the surrounding area. These criteria include:

1. Site Analysis and Development
2. Percentage of non-permeable surface (roof, parking, sidewalks – areas that promote run-off)
3. Planning
4. Building Height
5. Building and Structural Setbacks
6. Proportions and Massing
7. Pattern and Rhythm of Structures
8. Roof types and Materials
9. Surface Color and Texture
10. Building Projections
11. Architectural Details
12. Landscape Architectural Treatment

- **Site Analysis and Development Planning**

Site analysis, in all development, provides one of the most important and frequently under-exploited opportunities to understand the limitations and possibilities of a site. Interest regarding development on highly exposed sites with valued scenic resources may conflict with the scenic, open space, and/or community design goals of the City. An adherence to the goals set forth by the Ahwahnee Principles will provide focus and intention to the process. Site analysis and efficient development staging can help limit the amount and cost of grading, can maximize lot and building orientation, and provide a site and structure that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the constraints of the development site.

- **Building Proportions, Height and Setbacks**

New structures should have a variety of heights, and yet be compatible with other buildings in the vicinity, with the goals of preserving and enhancing design qualities of the built environment and preserving views. Setbacks should be compatible with those of surrounding structures and scenic resources, providing building presence without allowing the structure or development to dominate other buildings, the streetscape, or the natural scenic views. Under-building parking should be encouraged to reduce the amount of non-permeable/paved parking area adjacent to buildings. The proportions of proposed residential, commercial, or industrial structures will also affect their compatibility with site and surrounding conditions. Establishing a relationship between existing and planned development may set a standard that is meant to rejuvenate a neighborhood, giving it greater influence in establishing future design criteria for the neighborhood. Generally, height and width of building elevations should not be significantly out of character with existing neighborhood development or interfere with natural scenic views.

- **Pattern and Rhythm in Community Design**

Nature makes, and human communities strive to adopt, natural and instinctively pleasing patterns and rhythms of motifs and massing in community development. How well these elements are handled can range from harmonious to clashing relationships. The recurrent alteration of peaks and slopes of the hillsides can be emulated and complemented in the design of building roof lines, and in the space and solids of buildings. The development of pattern and rhythm establishes a theme when viewed in the context of surrounding development. At close quarters, pedestrians should be provided with a varied integration of structure and landscaping to soften and tie the structural elements to the natural ones.

- **Roof Types and Materials**

The rhythmic patterns in new buildings and landscape architectural treatments should complement and integrate with the established structures and surrounding natural environment. Roof types and materials and roof lines can play a critical role in either complementing or degrading natural scenic views. Roof types, from flat to multiple arrays of hipped roofs, provide a range of possibilities for contrasting or imitative treatment. Unnecessary building heights are frequently related to roof design, when the roof should be balanced with the building elevation it helps to create. Scale, pattern and rhythm are also applicable to roof design and materials.



- **Surface Texture and Color**

Variable weather conditions in conjunction with the variable color of the surrounding hills and landscape make the selection of surface texture and color especially critical to compatibility issues. Surfaces that emulate the coarse, warm tones of the surrounding hills are highly desirable, while slick and shiny finishes produce glaring surfaces that detract from the surroundings and are not pleasing to the eye. However, the emergence of post-modern and other hybrid architectural styles, with their juxtaposition of architectural motifs and the use of contrasting, unusual colors and building materials, are examples of how contrast can be made compatible within broader standards. Surface texture differs from patterns and rhythm in that texture is provided on a substantially reduced scale. It is seldom as strong a design element as architectural pattern or massing. Although styles change with time, and while the use of strong color may play a dominant part in the design of structures, color is easier to change once development has occurred. As with other elements of design, texture must be used carefully so as to complement the overall design while being compatible with surrounding materials.

- **Building Projections and Architectural Details**

Much of a building's design is expressed in the detail and projections that grow out of the building envelope. Building projections and other architectural details play important functional and aesthetic roles in a building's efficiency as shelter as well as its appearance. Providing privacy and screening from the elements, projections and architectural detail also



affect surrounding development. The use of porches and verandas can further enhance residential living space and provide protection from sun and wind. While simple and ornate architectural detail may each represent legitimate design principles, buildings of each style may clash or contrast with surrounding development, and suffer from the comparison. The appropriateness of a particular building design must be viewed within the context of the building's natural setting and man-made environment.

- **Site Planning and Community Design**

Site planning involves the distribution of buildings, parking, driveways and landscaped open space areas of a site. It establishes the development's relationship to the street and surrounding lands. The influences of site design are not always easy to visualize and assess without the development of a detailed site plan. Frequently, the complexity or importance of a proposed development may make it appropriate to require the preparation of perspective renderings of the plan and structures. Care should be taken not to allow artistic applications of color, landscaping, and graphic "eye wash" to obscure or misrepresent the final product as it will actually appear on the development site. Together with building architecture, site planning is a critical design parameter determining the compatibility of proposed development with the existing development in the area and the character of the community.

Gateways, Crossroads, Corridors and Scenic Places

In addition to the architectural character of community design, other elements must be addressed when considering the community as a whole. These include areas with important landmarks and focal points, which lend identity and character to the community, and creates a sense of place. Landmarks or focal points may include natural, historic, architectural, or cultural areas of interest.

Some of the most important community assets are the scenic resources of the area, including Liberty Lake, the Spokane River, Mica Peak, Mt. Spokane, Kramer Hill, and Holiday Hill which contains the Legend Tree as described in the Cultural and Historical Resources element, and other foothills surrounding and encompassing the City. Preservation of these scenic vistas is an important goal of the community. However, various types of land development, the construction of buildings and walls, landscaping, roads, and the extension of utility lines and other facilities may degrade the scenic resources of the community.

The City's natural scenic beauty, as viewed from public thoroughfares and private lands, provides residents and visitors with a direct experience of the breathtaking landforms that define the character of the community. The protection and enhancement of the City's views is critical to promoting a quality image of the City of Liberty Lake. An essential part of this effort is the identification of important areas of significant natural scenic value and setting standards to preserve these resources with continued urban development.

The scenic resources of the community are most apparent to the traveling public. The natural vistas visible from City streets cannot be properly viewed or appreciated if screened by buildings, walls and landscaping, or the indiscriminate placement of signage. The City, County, and State all play active roles in scenic resource preservation.



Liberty Lake has a variety of important entry and focus points, which provide opportunities to reinforce the City's identity. The integration of monuments and appropriate signage, as well as special streetscape and landscape treatments, can be used to reflect the community's unique character. Focal points can be located anywhere along major routes, including important street corners, within parks and other public open space, civic buildings, schools, and historic areas. Adequate areas for significant landscape or architectural treatment, City entry signage, special paving, and other identifiable treatments all lend character and identity to entry and other focal points. Examples of developed landscape architectural elements include the boulevard designs of Harvard Road, Molter Road, and Country Vista, which provide a welcoming experience to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians as they travel through those portions of the City. The boulevards also provide a sense of place and vitality to the City. Landscaping elements, monument signage, site furnishings, and open space areas should all be considered in the development standard and policies for landmark or focal point enhancement. Other corridors that exist in the City that could be developed into boulevards are Liberty Lake Rd., Appleway, and Mission (see Goal LU.22). Improvements at the main intersections and entry points of the City are currently in various development and planning stages.

Neighborhood parks are among the City's most valued scenic places, as they provide an enhanced sense of community for its residents as well as a visual sense of calm and well-being. The citizens of Liberty Lake have stated that our residential neighborhoods are among the City's greatest assets. The layout of land parcels within a subdivision can influence the economic impact, traffic safety, and livability of a neighborhood. Placing parks in the center of a neighborhood, for example, serves to provide a community with a meeting point, a place for family activities, and a central neighborhood gathering place.

- **Signage and Viewsheds of Public Rights-of-Way**

The Interstate 90 corridor, Appleway, Liberty Lake, Country Vista, Sprague, Molter, and Harvard are the most frequently traveled, and are



most impacted by signage of businesses attempting to make their existence and location known. Enhancing commercial signage should be conducted in a manner that minimizes the adverse economic impact on business, while restoring the views along existing and planned commercial corridors. Continued review of our City signage standards will aid in this goal.

- **Transportation and Community Design**

A broad range of transportation-oriented community design issues must be faced as the community continues to grow. Development design issues and details that must be given careful attention include entry point monument signage, street signage, commercial signage, street lighting levels and fixtures, bus turnouts and shelters, curb and pavement treatments, median island and parkway design and landscaping, roadway reflectors and guardrails, bike lanes and other on-road graphics, and utility structures and facilities. Consistent safety and comfort features for pedestrians and bicyclists are central to the City's vision of itself as a livable community.

Developers of commercial projects should be encouraged to "break up" large expanses of parking with landscaping and pedestrian paths, locating buildings at the street, and parking at the sides, rear, or within the buildings. This design approach also serves to provide the streets with a sense of vitality and community.

- **Scenic Highways**



Especially striking are the foothill views to the east and south as one descends into the City of Liberty Lake from the I-90 freeway, as well as the mountain vista to the north. It is an essential and critical component of community design in the City of Liberty Lake, while effectively linking the City with other Spokane area communities. Many functional community design goals can be achieved through the detailed design and

planning for the City's major gateways and corridors. The safe, functionally efficient, and aesthetically pleasing design and buildout of these sites is a key element in the City's overall economic health and prosperity.

Neighborhood Design

The City of Liberty Lake prides itself on having a wide variety of neighborhood settings and considers its residential neighborhoods to be one of its greatest resources. Attributes that can make a neighborhood unique include adherence to Ahwahnee Principle concepts.

Historical patterns of urban and suburban development seriously impair quality of life. The symptoms are:

1. more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles,
2. the loss of precious open space,
3. the need for costly improvements to roads and public services,
4. the loss of a sense of community.

By drawing upon the best from the past and the present, the City of Liberty Lake can plan our community so that it will more successfully serve the needs of those who live, work, and play within it.

- **Architecture**

Architectural commonality can be established throughout the neighborhood with the coordinated and complementary use of various design components, including building colors, roof design and color, window and garage door treatment, and architectural building accents and details. These components should be mixed to create a balance of variety, compatibility, and conformity or cohesion.

- **Perimeter Wall/Fence Treatment**

Walls and fences define the borders of residential communities and are used in perimeter landscape treatments for a variety of other development types in the City. Varied fencing types and interspersing solid fences with fencing that contains partial openings or breaks provide views into development open space areas and relieves the closed in feeling that walls can engender. The City should encourage the use of this type of viewshed window as a means of reducing the tunnel effect and preserving scenic vistas.

- **Streetscapes**

One of the most prominent and visible exterior features of neighborhoods and private communities is streetscapes. Design can range from the "formal" to the "natural" or combinations of both approaches. Formal design may include ordered rows of trees or other distinctive trees/shrubs, regularly interspersed with equally ordered shrubs and beds for annuals planting. More informal designs seek to imitate nature by interspersing native and non-native plantings in a free-form or random pattern. Groupings of major elements, and the use of lawn areas may also be integrated into both more and less formal designs.



Community Design in Public Facilities

Community design encompasses the entire City and includes public buildings, utilities, and street traffic control and safety devices that have the potential to detract from the appearance of the community. The City must consistently make quality appearance one of its prime priorities. Current efforts include the development of unique and distinctive landscape treatments on major roadways. Natural colors and tones can also be integrated into street signs, traffic signals, and lighting standards to soften their impact on the surrounding views.

Transit shelter design should also be a high priority, making these facilities functionally superior and aesthetically pleasing. These structures can utilize architectural styles that complement the streetscape treatment and elevate the appearance of these utilitarian structures. Utility cabinets located along the street, including traffic signal and telephone switching facilities, are often painfully obvious. To the greatest extent possible, these features should be installed in underground vaults, or effectively screened from public view. Directing the placement of telecommunication lines underground, at the rear of properties, or in alleyways and requiring undergrounding of all newly installed or extensively modified utilities, 13kV or under, can also help to reduce visual clutter.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Community design considerations, including preservation and enhancement of scenic boulevards, can subtly and profoundly shape the image of the community. Establishing basic

criteria to promote good and conscientious design that enhances community cohesiveness will allow the City of Liberty Lake to emerge as a thriving community where one can live, work, and play. Community design considerations are directly related to issues associated with land use, traffic, arts and culture, health and safety, economic development, and environmental systems.

The Urban Design and Community Character Element can be implemented by several mechanisms, which include the thoughtful application of the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan, the City Zoning Code, Development Regulations, and Design Standards. These instruments set forth specific standards and establish design parameters and guidelines for site planning and building design.

C. Goals and Policies

Goals

D.1a: Citywide design and development that promote and support a well-integrated residential community, provide a heightened sense of livable community, and present opportunity for public gathering.

D.1b: Community design, architecture, and landscaping that enhance and are compatible with the City's setting and natural scenic resources.

Policies

D.1.1: Public and private sector development shall be subject to citywide design guidelines which are intended to protect the community's scenic views, provide community cohesion, and enhance the community image of Liberty Lake.

D.1.2: The City shall support the positive, unique characteristics of existing residential neighborhoods and require that new neighborhoods be designed to provide distinctive, identifiable design elements.

D.1.3: The City shall have a distinct, identifiable center that combines civic, cultural, and recreational uses.

D.1.4: Support the development of distinct, identifiable street corridors and boulevards.

D.1.5: Areas of special interest, including entry points, landmarks, and scenic views, shall receive appropriate treatment whether part of public or private development proposals.

D.1.6: Native landscape materials and site-sensitive architectural designs shall be incorporated into all public and private building projects to enhance the cohesion between the natural and built environments.

D.1.7: Commercial development projects shall contribute to the design objectives of the community and the specific district or corridor in which they are located.

D.1.8: Community and Neighborhood Centers, which concentrate land uses at high intensities, shall be established at appropriate locations to encourage public social interaction and a sense of public space.

D.1.9: Neighborhoods shall establish a well-defined edge or boundary, consisting of landscaping, green belts, open space, and/or entry monumentation, in appropriate locations to help create a unique community image and sense of place.

D.1.10: The City shall maintain and enforce a Sign Ordinance that defines permitted sign locations, sizes, maintenance, and other related requirements.

D.1.11: In an effort to preserve the value of the community's night sky, outdoor lighting shall be limited in height, number, and intensity of fixtures needed to provide sufficient security and identification on residential, commercial, and other development.

D.1.12: Incorporate the City's identification symbol into street signage, planters, benches, public buildings, City vehicles, streetscape furnishings, and other appropriate applications.

D.1.13: The City shall support a high level of Code Enforcement to encourage neighborhood beautification and to maintain property values and quality of life.

D.1.14: Direct placement of telecommunication, cable television lines, and other utility facilities underground, at the rear of properties, or in alleyways and require undergrounding of all newly installed or extensively modified utilities, 13kV or under, to protect viewsheds and corridors. (see LU.5.6 & U.5.1)